

Review of the Musical Season of 1896-'97.

THE musical season of 1896-'97, just closing, was remarkable more on account of the disasters that overtook two grand opera organizations than for any artistic advance. On the whole the season of German opera under the direction of Walter Damrosch was the most successful musical enterprise of the year. Mr. Damrosch's organization presented all of the Wagnerian operas and musical dramas with the exception of "Rienzi" and "Parsifal."

As to the former, the retirement from the stage of Albert Niemann and Albert Schott cleared the field of artists who could confidently be trusted with the title role of that opera. It was natural that Mr. Damrosch should respect the wishes of Wagner that "Parsifal" should remain sacred to Bayreuth. All of the other works of the German master were presented in a thoroughly artistic

manner. For the third time Mr. Damrosch proved his signal ability as a director, acquitting himself with distinction at the most difficult task any composer has created.

To Mr. Damrosch's enterprise was due the return of Madame Lilli Lehmann, who demonstrated again how the ability to sing parts as that of Brunhilde without injury to the vocal organs is simply a question of physique and proper training. Mme. Nordica was practically the only other notable artist of the organization. This American representative of the Wagnerian cult appeared four times with distinct success, winning new laurels for herself and the Wagnerians. Otherwise the strongest members of Mr. Damrosch's force were Fischer, Johannah Gadsby, Paul Kalisch and Augusta Vollmer. But if the organization was lacking in stars of the first magnitude the en-

semble seldom failed to satisfy, the result being both an artistic and financial success.

The strongest argument which the Wagner party offered during all the controversy growing out of the breaking down of Melba's voice while attempting the part of Brunhilde was the presentation of Lehmann in the same role. The perfect rendition by this artist who had grown almost gray in the Wagner harness without apparently sacrificing a particle of voice or vitality was an illustration that went farther than all other arguments combined. Prior to the advent of Lehmann the controversy presented in the columns of the Journal over the signatures of a majority of the greatest artists in the country favored the theory that no lyric artist could persist in singing the heavier roles of Wagner except at serious hazard to the voice. One result of the Damrosch season



WALTER DAMROSCH.



ANTON SEIDL.